

So upon returning for his third tour, Sergeant Henehan immediately noticed that after this push, while not always willing to openly support the coalition forces, Iraqis felt safe enough to give him tips on where the insurgents were hiding. This change in mentality, coupled with Sergeant Henehan's knowledge of family and tribal connections, allowed him to determine which people to ask about each of the 18 high-value insurgents he located. He knew exactly who would be willing to tip him off about a social rival or historic foe.

Traveling with an interpreter, Sergeant Henehan had a talent for remembering names and personal details. He took every opportunity he could to talk with locals and learn about the town's social organizations and tribal boundaries, often returning several times to talk with the same families to gain their trust. He would bring with him candy, good humor, even doctors. He would knock on the doors and politely ask to chat. Entire families opened up to him. Sometimes it would start with a toy given to a child, sometimes it was a heartfelt conversation with a shopkeeper. The response he got astonished everyone, including the insurgents hiding out in the town.

The 12 marines in his squad called him a fair but tough leader with whom they felt very safe. His intense and proactive preparation for the more than 80 combat missions which he led and his personal attention to each of his 12 soldier's well-being gave them a sense of security. They, too, noted how his relaxed Alaskan exterior quickly helped earn him the respect of the townspeople.

Even more remarkably, Sergeant Henehan's reputation for being fair and caring allowed him to detain all 18 high-value insurgents without any real violence. These 18 also led him to their associates, significantly disrupting insurgent operations in that part of Al Anbar Province.

Sergeant Henehan remained behind after his unit returned to the States to train new troops about how he had learned to wage urban warfare while gaining the trust of the townspeople. The downturn in violence in Al Anbar can be linked perhaps in part to his efforts and the efforts of those like him.

Sergeant Henehan is currently attending a California community college and plans to transfer to a larger State school after completing his distribution credits. He wants to major in computer games and even talks of one day creating video games that more accurately portray what war in the modern era is like. He has already begun organizing photographs from his three tours to use as backdrops. Clearly, his talent for careful planning and his desire to share his knowledge and experiences with others did not leave with his donning of civilian clothes.

I wish him the best in all of his future endeavors, just as I wish the best for all Alaskan veterans and those now serving.

MEDICARE REIMBURSEMENT

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I wish to take a few moments to speak on the issue of Medicare reimbursements for physicians, particularly those in rural and frontier States. We have moved forward a temporary fix of Medicare reimbursement for physicians, essentially for 6 months. I wish to speak to the issue for Alaska and other rural parts of the country.

In Alaska, many of our Medicare beneficiaries, even without this potential 10-percent reimbursement cut, lack the ability to see a primary care physician unless they have the means somehow to pay out of pocket for doctor visits. Without congressional action on a long-term strategy—longer than 6 months—to increase Medicare reimbursements, these cuts threaten access to care as fewer and fewer doctors are able to afford seeing Medicare patients. An American Medical Association survey shows that 60 percent of physicians reported they would be forced to limit the number of new Medicare patients they treat if the impending reimbursement cuts go through.

I get so many calls on a daily basis from seniors asking me to fix Medicare. They want to be able to continue to see their doctor. I know I am not the only Member who receives these calls. It is unfortunate, but America's seniors every year are thrust in the middle of this Medicare reimbursement debate out of fear that they are going to lose their health care provider to Medicare cuts.

In 2003, with great fanfare, we provided a Medicare prescription drug benefit. At that time, I asked the question: We can have a wonderful drug benefit, but what good is the benefit if there is no physician to write the prescription?

The Presiding Officer knows how big a State it is; she has had the opportunity to come for a visit. We are bigger than California, Texas, and Montana combined. "Rural" in Alaska has a new meaning. The physician shortage crisis in Alaska has been magnified because of our geography, distance, and size.

What many people might not realize is what is happening to our population. We have always been viewed as a young pioneering State where the average age is the early 20s and predominantly male—a wilderness image. But we have grown and matured. Our elderly population is the fastest growing senior population per capita in the Nation behind Nevada. That is a statistic which would surprise many people.

The Mat-Su Valley, an area just north of Anchorage, is the fifth fastest growing region among seniors nationally. Yet, think about that statistic and compare it with what is happening with our physician ratio. Alaska has the sixth lowest ratio of physicians to population in the United States. Outside of the Anchorage area, our ratio of physicians to population is the worst in the Nation.

To put it into context, we had a field hearing the first part of the year to understand how bad the situation is as far as access to care. To reach the national average of physician-to-patient ratio, Alaska needs a net increase of 980 physicians statewide or 49 more physicians per year. I go into some of these hospitals, VA clinics, and community health centers. They have been waiting years trying to find not only doctors but all within the medical profession, whether it is outpatient therapists all the way up to cardiologists. Fairbanks, our second largest city, got its first cardiologist this year.

According to the Anchorage Daily News, our largest newspaper, it costs 65 cents on the dollar to care for a patient in Alaska, and yet Medicare only reimburses 22 to 35 cents on the dollar. In addition to low reimbursement, we have other factors that drive the cost up. We have higher salaries, a higher cost of living, higher equipment costs, and higher transportation costs. Higher energy costs add to that.

We had a field hearing earlier in the year and had an individual testify before the committee. He was later quoted in the Anchorage Daily News:

The costs [to practice] were so exorbitant and the fees for reimbursement were so low for Medicare patients, at the end of the day I could actually owe money for working a ten-hour day.

The sustained growth rate formula which has been in place since 1997 calls for nearly 40 percent in cuts over the next 8 years, even as practice expenses continue to increase. So how do we expect to entice more physicians to practice and care for our seniors, our veterans, if we threaten to cut Medicare reimbursements every year?

We know the time for Congress to act is now. I ask my colleagues, those on the Finance Committee, let's work on legislation that will provide a long-term reimbursement fix to ensure continuous care for the elderly, who may otherwise be left without access to care in the neediest of times. This is something we all must work to advance.

TRIBUTE TO SENATOR TRENT LOTT

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, yesterday was a day of tribute to one of our colleagues, a gentleman who has served his State and this country admirably for many years. I have not had the privilege to serve in the Senate with our colleague for as long a period as many of those who spoke yesterday, but I think we know it doesn't take long to realize how important has been the contribution of the Senator from Mississippi to this institution. I listened yesterday to so many of the kind words. I heard repeated time after time: statesman, leader of an institution, truly a statesman.

We all know of TRENT LOTT's tremendous dedication to the institution that is Congress, 34 years of public service between the House and Senate, his creation of the whip organization in the

House that emphasized Member-to-Member contacts and outreach that are so important in building relationships, election to the Senate in 1988, Senate majority leader in 1996, and then Republican whip earlier this year. We don't want to lament the loss of a tremendous asset, but we need to always remember to celebrate those accomplishments, learn from them.

I learned that if there was a problem that needed to be resolved, you could go to TRENT to resolve it. When there was a compromise that needed to be brokered, TRENT could figure out how to make that happen.

I learned that when there was a shortage of tomatoes at the Lott household, TRENT knew he could just go a couple doors down the street and find some tomatoes in a friendly neighbor's yard. My husband and I have been neighbors with TRENT and Tricia these past 5 years. As neighbors, we share a lot of things. We share a lot of leaves. He blows the leaves down the sidewalk to my house, and my husband will blow the leaves back down to his house—good, friendly neighbors. I have always appreciated that.

Truly, whether it is the quick conversation between Members during votes or whether it is the closed-door sitdown when he comes to the office and says: LISA, I want to talk to you about this, TRENT knows the pulse of the Senate.

I would watch him on the floor. He was like a butterfly. He would come over and alight next to somebody, have a quick conversation, a talk, and then he would move over to another area and do the same thing, kind of going from person to person, always working but always friendly and always working to find a path forward. His ability to develop those relationships and work out a deal to everyone's satisfaction is a skill I certainly look to as a model for how the Senate should operate.

It is with great fondness that I wish my friend, my colleague, my neighbor well in his future endeavors.

I wish him and Tricia well and truly love as they embark on their next adventure. We do know there will be adventures. I thank him for his friendship, his service to this Nation and to this institution.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 1498

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 455, S. 1498; that the committee-reported amendments be considered and agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read a third time, passed, and the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, without further intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, on behalf of Senator COBURN, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, the Captive Primate Safety Act, S. 1498, is an important, bipartisan bill promoting the humane treatment of animals and protecting public health and safety from the considerable risks associated with primate pet ownership and trade.

On May 24, 2007, I introduced S. 1498, with Senators VITTER, LAUTENBERG, LIEBERMAN, and MENENDEZ. Senator ENSIGN is also a cosponsor.

Nonhuman primates are susceptible to many biological agents that infect human beings, including tuberculosis, Ebola/Marburg, and poxviruses. Because of the serious health risk, importing nonhuman primates into the United States for the pet trade has been banned by Federal regulation since 1975. In addition, many States already prohibit these animals as pets. Still, there is an active trade in these animals. Estimates are that 15,000 are in private hands; however, as the trade is largely unregulated, the number may be much higher. Because many of these animals move in interstate commerce, Federal legislation is needed.

This legislation amends the Lacey Act to prohibit transporting monkeys, great apes, lemurs, and other nonhuman primates across State lines for the pet trade. The bill has no impact on trade or transportation of animals for zoos, medical and other licensed research facilities, or certain other licensed and regulated entities.

The Captive Primate Safety Act is supported by the Humane Society of the United States, the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, the American Veterinary Medical Association, Defenders of Wildlife and the Wildlife Conservation Society and many other environmental organizations and animal welfare groups.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, thank you. I appreciate your attention in presiding today, on a day when people are headed home. We are grateful for your presence here.

I join so many others—I do not want to be too redundant, but it is important to repeat expressions of gratitude—like a lot of people here, I have a lot of gratitude in my heart: gratitude for my wife Terese and my family for supporting me in my first year in the Senate; certainly for my staff—like so many Senators here could say of their own staff—I know it is true of mine; I have a great staff, and I am grateful for their help and their support and professionalism for almost a full year now; for the staff here in the Senate—I could go to any Senate office, but especially in the Chamber itself, all those who work so hard, day in and day out, year

in and year out, to make this place work, and to guide even those veteran Members on parliamentary questions, but especially some of the first-year Senators.

We are grateful for your skill, your knowledge, and your professionalism, and we wish you and your families a happy holiday season at this time.

The same goes for my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, who have been so supportive of me as a first-year Senator. I will mention two in the interest of time: Senator REID, our majority leader, the majority leader of the entire Senate, and also, of course, the leader of the Democratic side of the aisle—a great leader for our party, but even beyond that, a great leader for the Senate. He is a man of great compassion and decency, someone who cares about changing the direction of the country, to move us in the right direction. He has done that very well. I am honored to serve with him.

Senator LOTT is going to be leaving us. I had the privilege of presiding yesterday when I heard all of the testimonials to his service. I was honored to be a small part—a witness of that Senate history. We wish Senator LOTT and his family all of God's blessings at this holiday season. But also beyond the season, we wish him the best of luck in his new life outside of the Senate. We are grateful for his service.

I have one more note of gratitude and best wishes, and that is to those who are serving our country in Iraq and Afghanistan and around the world—those men and women in our military the world over who are doing that brave and noble service every day. We are thinking of them. We pray for them at this time, as we try to throughout the year. But especially we are thinking of them and their families at this holiday season.

(Mr. SALAZAR assumed the Chair.)

AMERICAN FAMILIES IN CRISIS

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I am going to try to be about 5 minutes. I want to highlight a couple of issues, not only because it is this season but I think especially because it is this season, the holiday season.

When we think about families coming together, we think about hope, and we think about caring for people. We think about exchanging gifts. It is a time of happiness. But for some families it is not so. It is a very difficult time for a lot of families—not only during the holiday season but the winter season.

I was struck, unfortunately, in a very negative way the other day. I think it was yesterday. I picked up the Washington Post and read a story about President Bush's speech about the economy. We can go through that and debate what he said, but one of the first sentences in that article quoted him as follows—when he was talking about the economy: